



*Care for Creation: Christian Activism and Biblical
Justification for Environmentalism*

In what ways might the Bible support Care for Creation?

Harriet Broadhurst

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Table of Abbreviations

CC: Creation Care

CS: Creation Spirituality

EC: Earth Charter

EDCC: Evangelical Declaration of Creation Care

ENN: Evangelical Environmental Network

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Introduction

In 1994 the 'Evangelical Declaration of the Care of Creation' (EDCC) was issued, by the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), to raise awareness of humanity's responsibility for the environment. The declaration came forth due to the growing evidence that the Western world had been exploiting the Earth and its resources. Unfortunately, the exploitation is still on the increase. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provided a report in 2018, demonstrating Western society's impacts on global warming. It verified an increase of 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels.¹

The purpose to question Christianity is due to its vast significance in Western culture, influencing the attitudes and behaviours of many individuals and institutions. In 2017, Christianity had 2.3 billion identifying members making up 31.2% of the global population. This large following foreshadows the extensive impact Christian environmental education could have.² Thus, the question "*In what ways might the Bible support Care for Creation?*" must be addressed.

The concept 'Western world' is a diverse, complex and controversial term. A common definition is, a society which shares related traditions, (liberal) political ideologies and religions, usually said to derive out of Western Europe, but not exclusively.³ Western cultures developed through Christianization and are typically

¹ IPCC, 'Preface' https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/02/SR15_Preface.pdf [accessed 4/04/19]

² Pew Research Center, 'Christians remain world's largest religious group, but they are declining in Europe, (2017) <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> [accessed 4/04/19]

P. Wesley Schult, Lynetter Zelezny, Nancy J. Dalrymple, 'A Multinational Perspective on the Relation Between Judeo-Christian Religious Beliefs and Attitudes of Environmental Concern' in *Environment and Behaviour*, no.4 (2000), p. 576-591

³ William H. McNeill, 'What We Mean by the West', *Orbis*, Vol 41 Issue 4 (1997), 513-524

well economically established. For this investigation, 'Western world' will be defined as a set of economically affluent countries, enforcing the division between the 'east' and the 'west' to be a matter of degree between the accessibility of technological advancements and industrial developments.⁴

The evidence of environmental degradation is undeniable. Climate change is now a very real existential threat to our whole civilisation, which has been caused by humanity. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has compiled a vast amount of research, indicating the rapid deterioration of the Earth. Prior to 1950, atmospheric carbon dioxide had never hit above 300 parts per million (ppm).⁵ However, 2018 reached an astronomical 400ppm, resulting in the Earth's temperature rising by 0.9 degrees Celsius, since the late 19th century.⁶ A change largely propelled by human-made emissions; transportation, electricity, agriculture, industry and residential. These findings are supported by Overshoot Day, an international organisation, who conclude 1.7 planets are "needed to support humanity's demand on Earth's ecosystems", foreshadowing the necessity of efficient and sustainable approaches to humanity's demand on the Earth's resources.⁷

As a result, environmentalism, 'the concern and action aimed at protecting the environment', exercises the minds of many biblical scholars.⁸ Therefore, this investigation will examine the biblical justification for creation care and identify

⁴ Peter Rudiak- Gould, 'Climate Change and Accusation: Global Warming and Local Blame in a Small Island State', *Current Anthropology* Vol.55, No.4 (2014), p.366

⁵ NASA, 'Graphic: The relentless rise of carbon dioxide' https://climate.nasa.gov/climate_resources/24/graphic-the-relentless-rise-of-carbon-dioxide/ [accessed 4/4/19]

⁶ NASA, 'Climate change: How do we know?' <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/> [accessed 5/03/19]

⁷ Earth Overshoot Day, <https://www.overshootday.org/> [accessed 5/03/19]

-58% decline in the average population size of vertebrate species since 1970 and 60% of humanity's ecological footprint is carbon

⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, Environmentalism, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/environmentalism> [accessed 7/03/19]

existing Christian interpretations that inform environmental activism. I will argue that the Bible contains pro-environmentalism motivation that can be applied to different forms of activism and theoretical approaches.

The Care of Creation has been formulated to enforce a defensive, honouring and respecting attitude towards God's creation. This Christian ecological care derives from a theological understanding of the importance of the Earth and the necessity to recognise humanity's responsibility, in the name of God, to protect the environment.⁹

Christianity's response to climate change and creation care is multifaceted due to the diversities and complexities in belief, culture and the environment. The major challenge in culture is the prominent androcentric and anthropocentric views. Androcentrism is a concept commonly used to describe a male-centred society; "...All our human scheme of things rests on the tacit assumption; man being held the human type..."¹⁰ This assumption derives from elite, predominately white, Western men who have constructed a belief that nature and women are to be subdued and controlled with functionality as their sole purpose.¹¹ Anthropocentrism, however, is the attitude that regards "humankind as the central... element of existence."¹²

Unfortunately, Western culture has been witness to some of the most detrimental anthropocentric obsessions, which are said to derive from a dualistic worldview. Namely, the idea that the world can be divided into binaries such as

⁹ Ben Lowe, *The Gospel Call to Creation Care*, online video recording, YouTube, 3rd February 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkhRbfdO5lw> [accessed 3/11/18]

¹⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World*, (Michigan: Charles River Editors, 2018), p.20

¹¹ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and Mastery of Nature*, (England: Routledge, 2002), p.106

¹² Oxford English Dictionary, 'Anthropocentric' <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/anthropocentric> [accessed 25/03/19]

nature/culture and man/woman.¹³ Christianity is said to have adopted these binary oppositions and claimed their authenticity through ancient biblical worldviews. As a result, it is often argued that dualism and Christianity have created conditions where nature is seen as weak and subordinate, resulting in justified ecological destruction and exclusion.¹⁴

In chapter one, '*For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created*' (*Colossians 1:16*), Christian organisations, responding to climate change, will be examined. This chapter will aim to answer the fundamental questions: what is creation care? Why do we need it and in what ways should Christians take responsibility?

In the second chapter, '*...It was very good*' (*Genesis 1:31*), I examine the biblical foundation and justification for creation care. The Bible is essential to reference due to its position of authority, for many Christians, signifying that certain passages could aid the reduction of environmental degradation. This investigation does not intend to suggest that the Bible wholesale promotes an environmental agenda, as passages do allude to an anthropocentric understanding, but many parts do promote creation care.

Lastly, in chapter three, '*... but the earth He has given to human beings*' (*Psalms 115:16*), I will assess the evidence of biblical creation care in relation to three theoretical approaches; creation spirituality, eco-justice and stewardship. The three approaches will be analysed and evaluated based on their efficiency and theological and ecological viability.

¹³ OED, 'Dualism', <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dualism> [accessed 26/12/18]

¹⁴ Norman Habel, 'Introducing the Earth Bible' in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2000), p.40-41

***“For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...”
(Colossians 1:16)***

The degradation of the Earth manifests itself in many ways; land, water, human and cultural degradation, deforestation, species extinction, global toxification and the alteration of the atmosphere.¹⁵ Each manifestation is caused and simultaneously inflicted upon humanity, instilling self-inflicted, catastrophic, long-term damage. Therefore, demanding a recognition that if we view informed consent as the basis of democracy we need to view destruction as the basis of catastrophe. Said catastrophe has been occurring for several decades as perceptions and feelings, towards the environment, are transitional, and transgenerational and trans-ideological.¹⁶

Whilst the consequences of environmental degradation are identified across the globe Western culture are the biggest contributors, inflicting fatal consequences on Non-Western countries.¹⁷ Many environmental issues seem external to the concern of the humanity but this is simply not the case. The interconnectedness between humanity and nature means the effects of climate change impact all. Susanne C. Moser reveals that certain climatic issues are “invisible” to Western countries, meaning there are no “direct and immediate health implications,” causing issues to be spatially distant and disconnected from Westernization.¹⁸ Whilst

¹⁵ R.J Berry, *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*, (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p.18

¹⁶ The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, ‘Preserving and Cherishing the Earth’, *Global Forum* (1990) <http://fore.yale.edu/publications/statements/preserve/> [accessed 19/12/18]

¹⁷ Rudiak-Gould, p.375

¹⁸ Susanne C. Moser, ‘Communicating climate change: history, challenges, process and future directions’ in *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 1.1 (2010), p.33-34

Western civilisation is able to disassociate themselves from environmental degradation, Sir David Attenborough asserts that the climatic struggle is universal and timely.¹⁹ In other words, climate change is already affecting the poorest and most vulnerable and will begin to affect Western society. Thus, the growth of environmental activism is essential to aid preservation, protection and conservation.

It is often argued that Christianity has been a cause of the negative relationship between the Western world and the Earth. Lynn White supports this by arguing that Western Christianity encourages and supports humanity's exploitation of nature, conceiving anthropocentric beliefs and attitudes.²⁰ White's argument subsequently critiques the dualistic interpretation, mentioned in the introduction. However, this investigation will consider both biblical authority and scientific influence, enhancing the mobilisation of engagement for Christianity.

The disassociation between humanity and the environment is often seen to originate from the Genesis translation; humans having dominion (1:27-30). Unfortunately, many Christians do not witness the degradation of the Earth as an issue to be tackled, but as a step towards the second coming of Christ.²¹ This is often justified by an anti-eco interpretation of the book of Revelation. Revelation talks of the second coming of Christ being initiated by great wickedness and turmoil, justifying Christians to encourage degradation in order to fulfil the prophecy.

¹⁹ *David Attenborough on the future of the planet- BBC Newsnight*, online video, YouTube, 3rd October 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRETT1L-aZQ> [accessed 5/04/19]

²⁰ Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' in *Science*, New Series, Vol.155, No.3767 (1967), p.1205-1206

²¹ *Resisting the Green Dragon of Environmentalism*, online video, YouTube, 26th May 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOH3aPLjCio> [accessed 5/11/18]

Anti-eco interpretations tend to argue that environmentalism is of a deadly and radical nature. James. A. Wanliss, for instance, in *Resisting the Green Dragon*, argues that environmentalism is toxic for human prosperity, life, freedom and Christianity.²² Wanliss, and others like him, believe environmentalism to be a new religion, going against the gospel of Jesus Christ, and subsequently corrupting Christianity. It is believed that environmentalism is distracting Christians from the “real crisis of sin and separation from God.”²³ Wanliss argues that the “green gospel” has created a hopeful future based on ecocentric approaches, which are not appropriate representations of a compassionate and loving life.²⁴ In other words, Wanliss fears that environmentalism will result in a “carbon-sensitive” faith, where geography and nature become critical for a relationship with God.²⁵ Despite this, I will go on to argue, there is a sound theological basis for Christian organisations to engage in environmental activism.

The necessity of Christian environmentalist thinking derives from “three truisms” provided by R.J Berry. 1) The recognition that humanity has harmed and are destroying the environment. 2) Christians have inadequate knowledge of environmentalism and, 3) A grey area of whether to accept damage as a sign of the second coming of Christ or seeing it as a disaster.²⁶ Berry’s truisms outline the flaws within the anthropocentric approaches to the environment, exposing the turmoil for and from the scientific community who believe it is necessary for a “spiritual and

²² Cornwall Alliance, ‘Resisting the Green Dragon’, (private) online video, Vimeo, www.vimeo.com/15849648 [accessed 28/01/19]

²³Earth Rising- An alternative Environmental Commentary, ‘The Problem with the Green Gospel’, <https://www.earthrisingblog.com/2016/07/30/the-problem-with-the-green-gospel/> [accessed 4/04/19]

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ R.J. Berry, p.13

religious ground on which to battle environmental problems.”²⁷ The abuse and neglect of this faith-based environmentalism could be, and for many is, considered a sin; “an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law.”²⁸ Similarly, many secular environmentalists see environmental degradation, and humanity’s response to climatic struggle, as a crime. The Prince of Wales, in his speech at the *Our Planet* premiere, alleges that the fundamental crime is humanity’s awareness of the heinous acts they are committing.²⁹ It is important to note that the Prince of Wales stated this within a secular context whilst maintaining a Christian faith, illustrating the coexistence of secular and Christian environmentalism.

As this investigation introduces biblical justification and Christian activism it will be argued that environmental degradation could be regarded as sinful. The activist groups discussed are the Evangelical Climate Initiative, Christian Aid, A Rocha, Christians in Science and the John Ray Initiative. Each of these groups sheds light onto the environmental issues in diverse approaches. The importance of diverse frameworks is evident throughout Moser’s explanation of effective active engagement. Moser suggests that different “messengers” and proposals are vital for the active engagement of different audiences.³⁰ An example of someone whom challenges diverse communication is Attenborough who demonstrates relentless dedication to raising awareness of environmental degradation, by creating educational documentaries. These documentaries highlight the environmental catastrophe that the Earth is facing today whilst instilling a hopeful belief that certain impacts can be reversed. *Our Planet*, Attenborough’s latest documentary, is

²⁷ Anna Lam, “Good News for Environmentalism” in *Translations* Vol. 2, Issue 1 (2007), p.10

²⁸ OED, ‘Sin’, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sin> [accessed 16/11/18]

²⁹ *Our Planet- Prince Charles speech at premiere*, online video, YouTube, 5th April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzHhEZYUibE> [accessed 5/04/19]

³⁰ Moser, p.43

accessible in 190 countries, reaching hundreds of millions of people.³¹ This foreshadows the commitment Christianity must take to create a universally accessible resource that encapsulates multiple interpretations.

Creation care has entered the theological realm in response to the enormity of environmental exploitation. This approach is said to descend from the '*Open letter to the religious community*', which was signed by two hundred and seventy-one spiritual leaders from around the world.³² The outreach aimed to create a global community in which ecological degradation would be contested. The "significant spectrum" of religious leaders consisted of Rabbi's, Bishops, Orthodox Reverends, Catholic Fathers and members of denominational churches.³³ It was designed to include religious communities and authorities, to utilise their large influence on both individuals and institutions. The involvement of religion affirms that scripture alone is not to blame for the exploitation of the Earth, it is rather interpretation concern. The open letter was a breakthrough for Christians fighting for environmental justice, allowing them to have a foundation for their beliefs, morals and actions. Additionally, due to the secular context of the letter, it allowed for factual evidence, spiritual belief and/or scriptural justifications.

The EDCC identifies that "the cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty..." is the work of the Creator God who is "relational in very nature", demonstrating that Christians have a unique responsibility to care for creation. Thus

³¹ *Our Planet*, produced by Alastair Forbergill, Keith Scholey, Colin Butfield, (Silverback films and WWF, 2019)

³² Ronald J. Sider, 'Biblical Foundations for creation care' in *The care of creation: Focusing concern and actions*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), p.44

³³ The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, 'The Joint Appeal in Religion and Science, (1991) <http://fore.yale.edu/publications/statements/joint-appeal/> [accessed 6/12/18]

recognising that “all creation is God’s; that God created it good; and God is renewing it in Christ.”³⁴

The EDCC can be explained in four stages:

- 1) God calls us to confess to attitudes that devalue creation and go against biblical revelation.
- 2) The behaviour, actions and attitudes of Christians need to derive from the centre of one’s faith, resisting ideologies that believe the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation.
- 3) One should seek to learn carefully all that the Bible reveals about the Creator and the human tasks.
- 4) One should seek to identify what creation exposes about God’s divinity.

The declaration aims to prevent Christians from evading the responsibility to take care of creation. Failing to recognise the responsibility is denying God’s goodness and power. The theological basis of the EDCC is evident; biblical faith is “essential to the solution of our ecological problems.”³⁵ As a result of the declaration, Christian organisations have been founded to support and foster an ecological preservation programme.

For example, the Evangelical Climate Initiative brought about the Green Bible. So-called “Red-Letter Bibles” have the words of Jesus in red. Similarly, the Green Bible highlights environmentally relevant verses in green.³⁶ The Green Bible

³⁴Evangelical Environmental Network, ‘Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation’ https://www.creationcare.org/evangelical_declaration_on_the_care_of_creation [accessed 7/03/19]

³⁵ R. J Berry, p.17-21
EEN, ‘EDCC’

³⁶ Sabrina Danielsen, ‘Fracturing Over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs Among Evangelicals, 1984-2010’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol 52 Issue 1 (2013), 198-212, p.199

categorises environmental verses in four ways; 1) How God and Jesus are involved in the creation, 2) How all creation is interdependent, 3) How nature responds to God and 4) How we are called to care for creation.³⁷ The Bible itself is made with recycled materials such as soy-based ink, a renewable cotton-linen cover and recycled paper. It includes essays from pro-environmental scholars, aiming to raise awareness and renew an appreciation of creation.³⁸ Not only does it shed new light on creation texts, but it also leads to a greater understanding of the beauty of God as Creator.

Additionally, the charity 'Christian Aid' aims to restore God's creation by addressing and equipping leaders of the Church. The majority of their work is biblically based, inferring that poverty and climate change destroy God's creation. Their biblical foundation is identifiable across their website, it provides daily Bible readings and explicitly references 1 John 3:18 as the summary of their actions. Its strategy, however, is not formulated on an established set of doctrines, allowing the diversity and complexity of Christianity to thrive within their mission. Their work clearly reinforces the argument that eastern society is subjected to the oppression and suppression of the west. Thus, Christian Aid intends to get the support of many Christian institutions for impacts are made with greater numbers, which has been made apparent through Moser's and Attenborough's approaches.³⁹

Whilst Christian Aid is charity focused, educational programmes such as A Rocha also exist. A Rocha is an international programme encouraging Conservation, Hope, Obedience, Justice and Love which is supported by science, research and practical

³⁷Got Questions, 'What is the Green Bible?' <https://www.gotquestions.org/Green-Bible.html> [accessed 7/03/19]

³⁸Compelling Truth, 'The Green Bible- What is it?' <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Green-Bible.html> [accessed 8/03/19]

³⁹ Christian Aid, 'Our Aim's', <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/our-aims> [accessed 26/11/18]

conservation. The five core commitments are Christian, Conservation, Community, Cross-cultural and Co-operation. Their fundamental belief is that members of the Earth should utilise power, knowledge and faith to bring about goodness and harmony. This power does not allude to exploitation or domination but a positive power which inflicts progression and liberation. A Rocha is not an outreach programme explicitly for Christianity but has created a Christian sub-programme, Eco Church, where Christian fundamentals can be enforced.

Eco Church, is an online resource for UK churches to learn how to demonstrate Christian love for God's creation. Their primary vision is "for all churches...to care for creation as an integral part of loving their neighbours and following God faithfully."⁴⁰ Eco Church encourages change and transformation in a vast area of Christian lifestyle; worship, church buildings, church land, engagement with the community, lifestyle and teaching. Their emphasis on change and transformation indicates the inherent negative mind-set that has previously infiltrated Christianity; anthropocentrism. To enhance success and efficiency, Eco Church is in partnership with Christian Aid, The Church of England, The Methodist Church, Tearfund and The United Reformed Church, confirming that numerous outreach programmes are accessible for multiple Christian interpretations and beliefs.

It should be borne in mind that, scientific reasoning is also key for enhancing environmental agendas.⁴¹ Both faith-based and scientific agendas can, and continue to, work cohesively. For example, Christian's in Science and the John Ray Initiative actively seek to unite the environment, science and Christianity, utilising scientific

⁴⁰EcoChurch, 'An A Rocha UK Project', <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> [accessed 8/03/19]

⁴¹ Sir Ghilleen Prance FRS, *Creation Care: Is it a responsibility of Christians to care for the environment?*, <http://www.cis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Creation-Care.pdf>

skills and Christian ideology. This ensures protection, preservation and conservation of creation.⁴² Whilst science enables a greater understanding of the severity of degradation, Christianity can be a fundamental aspect of the motivation to actively change behaviours. It is evident that both provide different elements of justification for environmentalism, allowing multiple contextual influences to occur and active recipient responses.

⁴² The John Ray Initiative, <https://www.jri.org.uk/> [accessed 26/11/19]

“...It was very good”
(Genesis 1:31)

Whilst it is important to understand the scope of contemporary Christian activism, it is essential to understand their theological foundation, and more particularly, the biblical texts that can be used to underpin a faith-driven ecological agenda. An overarching theme, amongst what I call ‘creation passages’, is that God’s creation is to be respected, honoured and preserved. Creation passages are verses that explicitly refer to nature and can be utilised as pro-environmentalist justifications. Whilst the Bible is renowned for the metaphorical representation of creation it is paramount to analyse Christian scripture. This analysis is essential due to the Bible’s authoritative power, deriving from its formative and normative nature. Rosemary Radford Ruether accurately articulates this in the following way: “the Bible has more promising leads, but our inherited view of God’s relationship to creation, and our relation to nature have modelled certain patterns of (male, white) domination...”⁴³

As a result, this chapter will aim to debunk some presuppositions about humanity’s justification to dominate the Earth and its resources. To counter such arguments this chapter will focus on the following biblical passages: Genesis 1:1-2:3, Revelation 21, Job 38-41 and Psalm 104. Each passage offers a perspective that could potentially formulate a biblical justification for creation care, simultaneously eradicating the domineering perspective humanity maintains. The creation texts are not of extensive nature but selective due to the limited space in this dissertation.

⁴³ Habel, p.32

Genesis 1:1-2:3 is vital to analyse as it introduces God and his function as Creator. It is frequently interpreted one of two ways; a literal depiction of the events or a story-telling device to comprehend the start of creation. It is highlighted that God creates all which is known and unknown, reminding Christians that only he can create ex nihilo; out of nothing.⁴⁴ Light, sky, land, vegetation, sun, moon, water creatures, birds, land creatures and livestock are explicitly mentioned. This passage situates humanity amongst all of creation, suggesting the author's intent of equalising the products of God. Despite the evidential role of God as Creator, it could be argued that God has given the natural world, as well as humanity, autonomous power. For example, Genesis 1:12 affirms that "the earth brought forth vegetation...", illustrating that God gave Earth allegiance and power to produce and sustain.⁴⁵ Terence Fretheim supports this by stating "both human and nonhuman creatures are called to participate in the creative activity initiated by God."⁴⁶ In other words, God empowers all creation and delights and reveals in his work. Furthermore, God continuously identifies creation as "good" (Genesis 1:31), suggesting satisfaction and jubilation. Destruction, evil and degradation were not established, illustrating that this behaviour is not prohibited and nor is it relational to God. However, a common interpretation of nature's divine goodness is that humans are able to utilise it for personal gain. Commonly, this results in the overlooking of nature's innate goodness that God himself discovers.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gerhard May, *Creation Ex Nihilo*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004) p.24

OED, 'Ex-Nihilo', https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/ex_nihilo [accessed 11/03/19]

⁴⁵ Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: a Christian Vision for Creation Care*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), p.88

⁴⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), p.38

⁴⁷ Habel, p.44

In spite of this, there are fundamental references to humanity's 'responsibility' to care for creation. This responsibility does not allow for the manipulation or the annihilation of nature, for God has willed both humanity and the natural world. Throughout Genesis, it is reinforced that human and non-human beings are designed to coexist, for all are inhabitants of the Earth. To be interrelated and interconnected suggests an innate necessity to respect and honour co-beings. Norman Habel develops this concept as the "Principle of Interconnectedness".⁴⁸ This principle illustrates that each living thing is connected through a complex and diverse web but bound by the same matter, implying equality among all creation.⁴⁹ Fretheim validates this interpretation by maintaining the belief that "...only in relationship to the creation can God's subsequent actions...be properly understood."⁵⁰ Consequently, if God creates humanity in his image a factor of such privilege should be one of relation and respect for creation.

In addition, Revelation has been widely misinterpreted due to its abstract imagery and metaphors, resulting in it being used as a justification for the mistreatment of the Earth. As a result, scholars have been analysing the scriptural and textual re-interpretation to ensure a 'green-print' theology; a theology that is overtly aware of the natural world.⁵¹ Revelation 21 discusses the death of earth: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..." (21:1). Gale Heide provides evidence that a common interpretation of 21:1 is an idea that humanity will be gifted with another material

⁴⁸ Habel, p.24

⁴⁹ Habel, p.45

⁵⁰ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch: Interpreting Biblical Texts Series*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), p.321

⁵¹ Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology*, (Newton Longville: Authentic Media, 2011)

Mark Wallace, *Green Christianity: Five Ways to a Sustainable Future*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010)

world once sin has corrupted this one, subsequently justifying degrading behaviours.⁵²

This interpretation relies on the belief that because the 'new' Earth will come, humanity is able to utilise, exploit and manipulate present creation to accelerate the fulfilment of prophecy. The 'new' and 'old' language is introduced earlier on in the Bible, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has away; see, everything has become new." This translation can be applied to Revelation 21:1 by identifying the Greek word 'kainos', meaning to 'renew'. The author's intent was to suggest a renewal of creation rather than eradication, contradicting the former interpretation. In other words, renew does not refer to death and replacement but growth and transformation of the existing Earth, suggesting the inappropriateness of degrading acts.⁵³ If all things will simply become new, one cannot justify destructive behaviour for certain aspects of environmental degradation are irreversible, as stated by the United Nations (UN).⁵⁴ Equally, if God works through creation, degrading behaviour cannot be authorised for it contradicts living life in accordance with God's will.

Thirdly, the book of Job is crucial to analyse when understanding creation care within biblical contexts. The book is, as are many, held with high regard as it raises questions on the problem of evil and suffering. Whilst Job heavily orientates around anguish it also references environmental observations God pronounces. Whilst these passages are often overlooked it is important to recognise the Wisdom

⁵² Gale Z. Heide, 'What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3', in *Journal-Evangelical Theological Society* 40, (1997)

⁵³ Dave Bookless, *Planet Wise: Dare to care for God's world*, (London: SPCK, 2012), ch.5

⁵⁴UN News, 'Greenhouse gas levels' (2018) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1026391> [accessed 11/03/19]

Margot Hudson, 'Environmental Christianity: insights from our Jewish Heritage' in *John Ray Initiative paper*, No.13

literature and its message to humanity. It demonstrates that humanity can learn from nature; animals, birds, plants, fish.”⁵⁵ Chapters 38 to 41 of Job are important to analyse for they presents a better understanding of the placement of creation, within scripture, when considering the state of the Earth.

It can be thought that the book of Job draws direct correlations with the book of Genesis, particularly in regards to the goodness of creation. Throughout chapters 38 to 41 God sheds light on the expanse and complexity of creation, “Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?” (38:32-33). This passage is a prime example of God having ultimate control over all creation and continuing to perform astonishing acts.⁵⁶ This inherently challenges anthropocentric attitudes as nature’s innate power is emphasised incessantly.⁵⁷ It is this that reminds Christians of the goodness and power of nature, which is not curated for the glory of human beings. The righteousness of nature is not a tool with direct relevance to humanity and God demonstrates this by bringing water to the wasteland (38:26-27). The wisdom of the natural world, described in this verse, distinctly reveals that it is provided for, just as humans are, suggesting equal significance. Additionally, whilst there is a reference to human affairs, it is only when God challenges and questions Job’s placement within society and what he should do to improve it (40:2-10), demonstrating the value of the natural world. If nature’s value is believed and recognised degradation is sinful, wicked and immoral.⁵⁸ Job’s observation and devotion can be a reflection on the necessity of environmental

⁵⁵ Norman Whybray, *Job*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p.71

⁵⁶ Whybray, p.154

⁵⁷ Cf. William A. Dryness, “Stewardship of the Earth in the Old Testament.”, in *Tending the Garden* ed. By Wesley Granger-Michaelson, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), p.52-53

⁵⁸OED, ‘Sinful’, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sinful> [accessed 13/03/19]

awakening.⁵⁹ It introduces the theocentric view of nature (God as a central focus), rather than the anthropocentric view (humanity as the pinnacle), indicating sincere respect and honour.⁶⁰

Similarly, the Psalms also glorify the celebration and honouring of all creation, and challenges those who do not. On the one hand, the book of Job is a relational text offering 'literal' references to nature and humanity's relationship. On the other hand, the Psalms are a series of emotional devotionals, introducing and aiding the expression of gratitude and emotions. Out of the hundred and fifty Psalms, one hundred and four have allusions to nature.⁶¹ It is apparent that throughout the 'nature psalms' the Psalmists did not arrive at conclusions of God through nature but conclusions of nature through God, demonstrating divine mystery.⁶² This section will focus closely on Psalm 104, for it reveals the wonder of creation in a way unmatched by any other creation text.⁶³ It sheds light on the beauty and interdependence of creation between humanity and animals. "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures." (104:24), presents a scriptural foundation for transforming the belief of dominance to a belief of integration and co-existence.⁶⁴ Psalm 104 explores the complexity and diversity of

⁵⁹ Patricia A. Mondore and Robert J. Mondroe, 'Ask the Animals' <http://www.leaderu.com/science/mondore-animals.html> [accessed 27/11/18]

⁶⁰ Cf. Richard A. Young, *Healing the Earth. A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), p.95

OED, 'Theocentric', <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theocentric> [accessed 25/03/19]

⁶¹ Ruth Elizabeth Sowle, *(The) Influence of Nature on the Book of Psalms*, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1929), p.7

⁶² Sowle, p.54

⁶³ William P Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1958), p.159

⁶⁴ James Limberg, "Down to Earth Theology: Psalm 104 and the Environment", *Currents in Theology and Mission* 21, (1994), p. 344-345

what creation means, illustrating God's infinite divine characteristics and power which are exalted through his intervention with creation.⁶⁵

The Psalmist portrays God's majesty, complexity, diversity and intimacy through His immanent relationship with all of creation, nature especially.⁶⁶ Whilst many interpretations of the Bible are of an anthropocentric focus, Psalm 104 focuses on the ecocentric profile; the belief that the rights of humans are not more important than other living beings.⁶⁷ It is not until verse 14 that humanity is mentioned and even so, this is in direct relation to cattle; "You cause the grass to grow for the cattle. And the plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth..." (104:14), highlighting that the cosmos does not merely revolve around humanity.⁶⁸ Additionally, this can be seen as an example of God's active promise, the renewal of all creation.⁶⁹

Three conclusions can be formed from Psalm 104; 1) God is confident 2) All of creation is dependent on God and, 3) God has personal delight in the goodness of his handiwork.⁷⁰ Ruth Sowle articulates this, in reference to the cosmos in 104:30, as, "nature is the garment of God; the heavens a curtain; the waters above the firmament the beams of His upper chambers; the clouds the symbols of His advent; and fire and winds His messengers."⁷¹ The evident dependence is a clear manifestation of the creating, sustaining, liberating and loving of all God's imminent work.

⁶⁵ Brown, p.160

⁶⁶ Francine Rivers, *Earth Psalms: Reflections on How God Speaks through Nature*, (Colorado: NavPress, 2016) p.ix

⁶⁷ OED, 'Biocentrism', <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/theocentric> [accessed 25/03/19]

⁶⁸ Brown, p.160

⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 31

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, p.32

⁷¹ Sowle, p.47

Throughout this chapter, it has been made evident that the Bible is full of resources for an ecocentric agenda. Each creation passage encapsulates the importance and grandeur of the natural world, and humanity, foreshadowing that the disregard of such passages does not align with the authoritative nature of the Bible. Therefore, if one identifies the Bible as an authoritative influence then the creation passages cannot be overlooked. As a result, these passages can be used for the justification and motivation for environmental education and Christian activism.

**“... But the earth He has given to mankind”
(Psalm 115:16)**

Whilst this investigation has demonstrated the growth of Christian activism and biblical justification, thus far, it is important to analyse theoretical approaches to creation care. Ecological concern and creation care, however, have only recently become more central to theological discussions and arguments. In order to prompt change, ecology must be discussed and normalised within both societal and theological circles.⁷² For decades Christian academia, in response to the ecological crisis (ecocrisis), has aimed to create new theological approaches.⁷³ Whilst there is some literature on the development of green religion it is still a minority area, foreshadowing the necessity of theological based study.⁷⁴ The discussion of green religion is vital for raising awareness and creating a space where ecological liberation can exist and thrive.

Considering the increasing number of environmental documentaries, strikes and conferences, such as Ted Talks, it would be dishonourable to say individuals were not becoming more conscious of the ecocrisis.⁷⁵ Some Christian scholars have perceived a central role for religion in the ecocrisis as it is problematic within both ecology and morality. S.H. Nasr affirms this concern by stating that “the vast majority of the human species... still live within a worldview dominated by religion,” whether

⁷² Edward T Wimberley, *Nested ecology: the place of humans in the ecological hierarchy*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p.6

⁷³ Sean McDonagh, *To Care for Earth: A Call to a New Theology*, (Vermont: Bear & Company, 1987), p.107

⁷⁴ Steve Murray Douglas, Religious Environmentalism in the West. I: A Focus on Christianity in *Religious Compass*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, (Canberra: Australian National University, 2009), p.729

⁷⁵ John A. Duvall, *The Environmental Documentary: Cinema Activism in the 21st Century*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017)

New Scientist Staff and Press Association, ‘Students join massive global strike against climate change’, *New Scientist* (2019) <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2196673-students-join-massive-global-strike-against-climate-change/> [accessed 8/04/19]

conscious of it or not.⁷⁶ In other words, ecological liberation relies on the fundamental belief that all are “moral actors” who can reduce their impact on environmental degradation.⁷⁷ Scholars, such as Sean McDonough, believe the physical environment plays a vital part in the understanding of the creator.⁷⁸ However, this has become a challenging process for humanity are now the orchestrators of the survival of nature, rather than nature determining the existence of humans.⁷⁹

The three theoretical approaches, creation spirituality, eco-justice and stewardship, aim to promote a better understanding of the relationship between humanity and the environment. For that reason, this chapter will evaluate and analyse the efficiency of the approach, in regards to faith-based creation care.

Creation Spirituality

Creation spirituality (CS) is a newly discovered path due to the prominent influence of anthropocentrism for centuries prior. However, CS is identifiable in ancient biblical traditions, including that of the Old and New Testament. The term ‘creation’ is seen as inclusive of all things; galaxies, trees, plants and all species, reinforcing the belief that nature and humanity are interdependent and maintain an innate unity.⁸⁰ Matthew Fox, a Trinitarian Christian, aims to reawaken mysticism to

⁷⁶ S.H. Nasr, *Religion and the order of Nature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.3

⁷⁷ Wimberley, p.2

⁷⁸ McDonagh, p.113

⁷⁹ Timi Ecimovic, ‘Philosophy of the Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Future of Humankind The Survival of Humanity’ in *International Journal of Research in Business and Technology*, Vol.3, No.3 (2013)

⁸⁰ Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p.7-8

Laurel Kearns, “Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States” in *Sociology of Religion* vol. 57, No.1, Special Issue: Sociology of Culture and Sociology of Religion, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.56

provide protection for the Earth.⁸¹ This is achieved by examining the origin of all things and the relationships which manifest among them.

Meister Eckhart, a German theologian, influenced Fox in the areas of ecological, social, economic and gender justice.⁸² Fox highlights Eckhart's teaching, that compassion, empathy and commitment are essential to the liberation of nature.⁸³ For Eckhart, "relation is the essence of everything that exists", and existence relies on the Divine.⁸⁴ Eckhart's notion of relation and the depth and complexity of interdependence is key when reaffirming the evidence that creation is interconnected. Whilst Fox believes that "human history cannot be divorced from...creation's entire unfolding history."⁸⁵ The Church continuously disassociates humanity with nature, resulting in the failure of respect and unity of creation, revealing the anthropocentric attitude that has infected Western and Christian ideals.

CS can be split into four paths; awe and delight (via Positiva), mental darkness and letting go (Via Negativa), creativity and imagination (Via Creativa) and, justice and celebration matter (Via Transformativa).⁸⁶ Each path leads to a better understanding of the cosmos, divine and the ecocrisis. Enlightenment in the three concepts educates Christians on a bio-sensitive approach; "a way of life that satisfies the health needs both of people and the ecosystems on which we depend and of which we are a part."⁸⁷ Diversity needs to be a fundamental consideration of CS if it is to become universally accessible.⁸⁸ If CS is able to transcend the nature/culture

⁸¹Matthew Fox, 'Welcome from Matthew Fox' <http://www.matthewfox.org/> [accessed 4/04/19]

⁸²Matthew Fox, *Meister Eckhart: A Mystic-Warrior for Our Times*, (California: New World Library, 2014)

⁸³ Kiva Bottero, 'Meister Eckhart: Interview with Matthew Fox on the man for all spiritual seasons', *The Mindful World*, <https://www.themindfulword.org/2015/meister-eckhart-matthew-fox/> [accessed 15/01/19]

⁸⁴ See Appendix A

⁸⁵ Fox, *Meister Eckhart*, p.13

⁸⁶ Fox, *Meister Eckhart*, p.18

⁸⁷ NATSOC, 'Biosensitive' <http://www.natsoc.org.au/about-fff/definitions> [accessed 20/01/19]

⁸⁸ Murray Douglas, p.17

divide it readily portrays a progressive eco-theology. Progressive eco-theology identifies that creation is complex and diverse but accepts the co-dependence and interdependence of nature.

Additionally, eco-theologian Thomas Berry, a renowned thinker within the eco-theology/spirituality realm, gives a vivid awareness of the beauty of ecological justice and encapsulates CS as a “new story.” The concept of a new story is comprised of an amalgamation of the Genesis story and modern science.⁸⁹ Whilst Creation spiritualists believe there is no nature/human divide it is clear that there are specific processes for humanity, which Berry articulates in twelve principles.⁹⁰

The twelve principles bring forth both science and religion. Science providing factual knowledge and religion providing spiritual insight. If science and religion align then CS could be used as a “common base for the Earth community.”⁹¹ The first principle suggests that the greater entities, the solar system and the universe, are mandatory for understanding the origins of being, allowing both scientific and religious scope. Principle three introduces the notion of subjectivity, which manifests into one of the most complex components of our universe. This ties in heavily with principle five, which illustrates human beings having access to an abstract, deep and earth-changing state, implying that the universe works through humanity and vice versa. This foreshadows principle two: human interconnectedness with the natural and cosmic world.

However, the unification of science and religion excludes those Western Christians who believe in the literal interpretation of Genesis. Due to its radical

⁸⁹ Kearns, p.60

⁹⁰ See Appendix B

⁹¹ Takeshi Kimura, ‘The Cosmology of Peace and Father Thomas Berry’s “Great Work”, *The Japanese Journal of American Studies*, No.20 (2009), p.187

egalitarian foundation, CS challenges the placement of humanity within the divine plan. In the literal interpretation, humanity is seen to be separate from the rest of creation (Genesis 1:27). For many Christians, the privileged position of humanity is fundamental due to the traditional emphasis anthropocentrism and anthropo-exclusivism views in society.⁹² In other words, only humans are afforded moral considerability. Therefore, CS could be contested for distorting and manipulating Christianity through the said radical egalitarian approach.

Eco-justice

In addition to Creation Spirituality, scholars have offered an alternative approach to the ecocrisis, namely, eco-justice, “the recognition that human and environmental rights are indivisible.”⁹³ The eco-justice movement began in the 1970s, responding to sobering evidence that nature imposes limits which have profound effects on all creation.⁹⁴ Eco-justice, for many scholars, is considered as a “system of thought and action” towards a healthy earth community.⁹⁵ Dieter Hessel, an eco-justice scholar, defines it as “the concern for ecological soundness and sustainability includes but transcends the concern of humans for themselves...”⁹⁶ Hessel articulates eco-justice into four norms:

- 1) A recognisable respect for the diversity of creation, including all species.
- 2) Ecologically sufficient and sustainable lifestyles – ecologically and socially appropriate technology to ensure equality.

⁹² R.F. Nash, *The rights of nature: a history of environmental ethics*, (Leichhardt: Primavera Press, 1990)

⁹³ Emily C. Hill, “Christianity and the Development of Eco-Justice” in *Pomona Senior Theses*, (Claremont: Pomona College, 2016), p.5

⁹⁴ William E. Gibson, *Eco-Justice—The Unfinished Journey*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004)

⁹⁵ Dieter T. Hessel, ‘Foreword’, *Eco-Justice – The Unfinished Journey* ed by. William E. Gibson, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.xii

⁹⁶ Dieter T. Hessel, “Eco-Justice Ethics”, *The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*, <http://fore.yale.edu/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice> [accessed 15/01/19]

- 3) Norms and values for fair and equal consumption so all have access to appropriate standards of living.
- 4) A global democracy, ensuring that all fragments of society have a voice to ensure the universal good.⁹⁷

Hessel, using the four norms and science, demonstrates that humanity's and nature's welfare cannot be separated.⁹⁸ The four norms curate a desirable universal unity for the global community, offering instruction for policy making and individual reflection. This is foreshadowed through the uprising of ecological understanding and activism in Western culture which simultaneously debunks the culturally embedded religiosity.

An example of institutional policymaking is The Earth Charter (EC), "an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society....," which derives from the eco-justice norms, and provides strategies to fulfil them.⁹⁹ The strategic approaches focus on different aspects including, ecological integrity, social and economic justice, democracy, nonviolence and peace. The diversity of aspects has subsequently allowed for the EC to be formulated into an educational tool for governments and international organisations. Accordingly, increasing numbers of government officials and lawyers proceed to recognise the EC as a soft law document; "laws that are neither strictly binding in nature nor completely lacking legal significance."¹⁰⁰ If Christianity were to recognise EC's importance it could foreshadow the progressive and diverse awareness it needs.

⁹⁷ Hessel, *The Forum*

⁹⁸ Hessel, *The Forum*

⁹⁹ Earth Charter, "What is the Earth Charter?", *Earth Charter Initiative*, <http://earthcharter.org/discover/what-is-the-earth-charter/> [accessed 17/01/19]

¹⁰⁰ US Legal, 'Soft Law', <https://definitions.uslegal.com/s/soft-law/> [accessed 17/01/19]

The ecocrisis is measured by identifying subcategories of harm; environmental, social, ecological, and species harm.¹⁰¹ Each subcategory holds the same value, signifying the interconnectedness of creation. Western degradation, such as excessive power usage, creates issues for the most vulnerable countries, as mentioned in the introduction. This can be seen through soil erosion, flooding, high levels of ultraviolet radiation, and a higher vulnerability to diseases. This is not an extensive list but all will result in higher death rates if countries across the world do not combat their actions.¹⁰² Therefore, William Gibson, director emeritus of the Eco-Justice Project, emphasises that eco-justice is more than a reminder for people to protect the environment but a reminder that they must protect themselves.¹⁰³ Utilising Gibson's eco-justice awareness could lead to immeasurable effects in the liberation of ecology.

However, for many, Christianity does not allow eco-justice to formulate a new way of living. Many traditions, such as androcentrism, are deeply embedded and highly problematic. Theologian Chung Hyun Kyung writes, "many eco-feminists reject the spirituality of traditional Western Christianity, which is based on Greek and Hellenistic dualism, a hierarchy of beings and an androcentric bias..."¹⁰⁴ Nature and women have been exploited and oppressed, suggesting the eco-justice approach cannot function within Western Christianity. This dualistic interpretation simultaneously creates an 'other' perspective.¹⁰⁵ In many ways, this resonates with

¹⁰¹ Rob White, *Environmental Harm: An eco-justice perspective*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014), p.3

¹⁰² Thomas Reardon and Stephen A. Vosti, "Links between rural poverty and the environment in developing countries: asset categories and investment poverty." in *World Development* 23 (1995), no.9, pp.1495-1506
Kathryn Vajda, "Environmental Issues Are Women's Issues", *National Women's Law Centre: Expanding the Possibilities*, <https://nwlc.org/blog/environmental-issues-are-womens-issues/> [accessed 17/01/19]

¹⁰³ Gibson, p.24

¹⁰⁴ Chung Hyun Kyung, "Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality: Towards a Spirituality of Eco-Feminism," in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. By David G. Hallman, (New York: Orbis, 1994), p.176-178

¹⁰⁵ Plumwood, p.2

Christian traditions, such as the 'fall' or the 'original sin' complex. A story where both Eve and nature are the evildoers and are the primary reason why both (women and nature) are born innately sinful. When Eve gave into temptation, nature automatically became the inferiorized 'other.' These dualisms have infected Christianity and Western culture, enforcing the belief that nature is weak and submissive.¹⁰⁶

Whilst this criticism of eco-justice is relevant and valid, one must reflect upon Chris Cowap's perspective of imposing eco-justice ethics on Western culture. Cowap articulates seven key elements of the common Western approach to environmentalism.¹⁰⁷ These elements require Christians to re-evaluate their presupposed position within creation. In other words, eco-justice demands a reconstruction of belief, regarding humanity's status, entailing the liberation of nature.

Stewardship

Furthermore, stewardship is the term used to characterise someone who manages a household but does not own it. This definition comes from the Greek word 'oikonomos', which translates to a household manager.¹⁰⁸ Stewardship is a well-recognized term within the Christian community, commonly said to derive from Genesis, "... fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (1:28). Peter Block, an

Rebecca A. Martusewicz, Jeff Edmundson and John Lupinacci, *Teaching for Ecojustice*, (United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis Ltd, 2011), p.75

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, (London: SCM, 1993), p.2

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix C

¹⁰⁸ First United Methodist Church, 'The Seven Last Words of Jesus', *A Family Lenten Devotional* (2017) <http://www.fumckilleen.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Lenten-devotional-booklet-2017.pdf> [accessed 17/01/19]

The Rev. Dr. Lin Hutton, 'The Builder: Making Disciples for Jesus Christ', *St. Thomas Episcopal Church*, Vol. XXXVI, Iss. No.9 (2018) http://www.stthomasorange.org/Customer-Content/stthomasorange/News/Builder_November_2018.pdf [both accessed 14/03/19]

American author, defines stewardship as “a choice to preside over the orderly distribution of power...the willingness to be held accountable for the well-being of the larger organization by operating in service, rather than control, of those around us.”¹⁰⁹ This suggests it is an active service which fundamentally brings about goodness and liberation, rather than exploitation. It must be borne in mind, however, that biblical elements, such as stewardship, are problematic due to their transitory temperament. Due to the culturally conditioned disposition of some biblical texts, one is unable to apply them accurately to contemporary society.¹¹⁰ Consequently, this creates a vulnerable foundation for stewardship to be the most plausible theoretical approach.

As a result of the tension, Bill Peel, an ecologist, constructed four important principles for effective stewardship: ownership, responsibility, accountability and, reward. Each principle reinforces that stewards do not own nature but are merely entrusted by the owner, requiring the stewards to act in trust and humility. The accomplishment of this act foreshadows their conviction of faith and motivation to dwell in the Lord.¹¹¹ In other words, in this co-partnership, God has the rights and stewards have moral and spiritual responsibilities. Robin Attfield, a philosophy professor, suggests that “the steward of an estate is answerable to its owner”, meaning Christians should be, and are, accountable for their actions.¹¹² This model of stewardship is critiqued by Clare Palmer, an environmental scholar, for she

¹⁰⁹ Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest* 2nd Edition, (San Francisco: Berrett- Koehler Publishers, 2013), p.xxiv

¹¹⁰ N T Wright, ‘How Can the Bible be Authoritative?’, *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991), p.5

¹¹¹ The High Calling, ‘Not Ownership but Responsibility (Leadership is Stewardship: Part 2)’, *Theology of Work*, https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/blog/not-ownership-responsibility-leadership-stewardship-part-2#.VP9dv4HF_33 [accessed 17/01/19]

¹¹² Robin Attfield, ‘Trustees of the Planet’ in *The Ethics of the Global Environment*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.47

believes it separates God from the natural world.¹¹³ This jeopardizes the radical potential of Christian environmentalism that needs to ignite amongst global conversations. Without the said conversations, desire and ambition for sustainability and restoration will not be at the forefront of humanity. Unfortunately, due to the Bible not providing fundamental guidelines to stewardship, the term is uncertain in Christian terminology. Therefore, “claiming a biblical pedigree for the idea is at best to oversimplify, and may be largely mistaken.”¹¹⁴

As a result, stewardship cannot aid the liberation of ecology due to its role in government organizations. Jennifer Welchman identifies that the concept derives “both as a practice and a concept, in patriarchal, elitist and anthropocentric social systems...”¹¹⁵ It is often used in governmental organizations as a way of “asserting or establishing ownership of a resource...”¹¹⁶ Due to the embodiment of Western culture, in Western Christianity, this patriarchal enforcement of stewardship is identifiable in the Church today. Gibson asserts that the Church has commonly overstressed the managerial role of humans, resulting in egregious management which inherently creates fundamental flaws to the liberation of ecology.¹¹⁷ Overstressing the role of humans reinforces the anthropocentric ethic which promotes the exploitation of the Earth and its resources to enhance nature’s functionality.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Clare Palmer, “Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics” in *Environmental Stewardship* ed. by Robert James Berry, (London: A&C Black, 2006), p.75

¹¹⁴ Palmer, p.66

¹¹⁵ Jennifer Welchman, ‘A Defence of Environmental Stewardship’ in *Environmental Values*, Vol.21, No.3 (2012), p.298

¹¹⁶ David Wasserman, ‘Consumption, Appropriation and Stewardship’ in *The Good Life, Justice, And Global Stewardship*, ed. by David A. Crocker and Toby Linden (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), p.537

¹¹⁷ Gibson, p.22-23

¹¹⁸ Attfield, p.50

Stewardships highly challenging connotations with power and responsibility contradict the aim of environmentalism. “The possessions of the master, in this case, the rest of the natural world, appear to be in a powerless position. Owned by one... they are at the lowest end of this hierarchy.”¹¹⁹ The idea that the environment is weak, inferior and powerless is deeply problematic both theologically and ecologically. Stewardship fails to recognise the importance and thus, continues to exercise an anthropocentric view of humanity. Without the recognition that nature has fundamental rights degradation will continue to manifest and cause detrimental implications. It is evident that stewardship still has a toxic anthropocentric view and so, I argue that stewardship is a flawed solution to the ecocrisis. And thus, education on the moral, theological and spiritual implications of actions is essential for Christian environmentalism to exist.¹²⁰

Richard and Val Routley, ‘Human Chauvinism and Environmental Ethics’, in *Environmental Philosophy* ed by Don Mannison, M.A McRobbie and Richard Sylvan (1980), p.96-189

¹¹⁹ Palmer, p.68

¹²⁰ Palmer, p.75

Conclusion

Christianity's response to the ecocrisis is diverse, complex and multifaceted due to the numerous interpretations and approaches. The creation passages have offered new perspectives on nature and have begun to separate Christianity from the toxic Western anthropocentric beliefs. Throughout this investigation biblical tradition has been subjected to scrutiny and challenge, to ensure oppressive attitudes are eradicated. The Bible is not one simple text, in its entirety, meaning many interpretations, approaches and beliefs must be considered. Nonetheless, I have made it apparent that it can be used as a crucial resource to mobilise Christians towards ecological justice, eliminating destructive behaviour.

I have argued that the degradation of the natural world can be seen as an affront to the glory of God, diminishing the beauty and magnitude of creation. Whilst it would be unjust to argue that Christians hold full responsibility, it is evident that the common approach is currently failing. As I have stated, the failure of ecological liberation is mainly due to the relationship between Western culture and Christianity. Therefore, the revitalization of Christians is required if one seeks to be "transformed into the fullness of Christ."¹²¹

In a reflection of this dissertation, I would conclude that it would be misinformed to claim that the Bible does not support creation care. The Bible, Christian activism and theoretical approaches have been revealed to work cohesively and effectively. It has been considered that the approaches may not explicitly identify with the definition of environmentalism but do enable ecological liberation, through the use of both science and faith.

¹²¹CC, <https://www.creationcare.org/work> [accessed 7/03/19]

The eco-justice approach thrives due to the emphasis on justice, allowing the respect and honouring of the interconnected body of species and creation to exist. This emphasis innately constructs a liberating future for all creation due to its recognition that all have been divinely manifested. To be overtly conscious of the indivisibility of human and environmental rights, Christians are able to curate a high functioning, sustainable and ethical way of life. Spiritually enriching oneself allows for better awareness and understanding of the divine. For Christians, this can establish itself through the use of worship and glorification of God. Eco-justice creates a way of life that allows the worship of God to prosper which is essential to a healthy Christian lifestyle.¹²²

The analysis of the theoretical approaches has subsequently clarified the motivation of the activist groups, mentioned in chapter one. Whilst none explicitly state their grounding in the creation care interpretations it is evident that eco-justice is the most identifiable. The evident use of eco-justice across the activist programmes implies inherent accessibility which improves the sustainability of aims. An example of the significant influence of eco-justice is Christian Aid who, since 2015, have managed to encourage 5,500 churches, in the UK, to switch to clean energy and educating corporate companies to make the “Big Shift” away from fossil fuels.¹²³ Additionally, the EEN is actively seeking Christians to join their mission and have already inspired 3,000 “champions”; an individual who embodies “a sense of personal transformation that has implications for social (cultural) transformation.”¹²⁴ Whilst they are marginally different, it demonstrates how eco-justice can manifest in

¹²² Dirkie Smit, “Liturgy and Life? On the importance of worship for Christian Ethics.” In *Scriptura* (1997), pp. 259-280

¹²³ Christian Aid, ‘Climate Change Campaign’ <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/campaigns/climate-change-campaign> [accessed 5/03/19]

¹²⁴ CC, <https://www.creationcare.org/work> [accessed 7/03/19]

multiple ways. It is crucial for an approach, which demands the change of behaviour and values, to be flexible and adaptable due to the expanse of contrasting interpretations.

It has taken too long for the Western Christian Church to make a fundamental difference to the ecocrisis and as a result, is now posing a threat to the likelihood of change. With the rise of pro-environmentalism theology, such as eco-justice, there is an opportunity for Christian activism to thrive. Education on eco-justice-centred biblical interpretation is essential for toxic anthropocentric views to be eradicated and for new perspectives to be conceived. It is patently obvious that nature cannot be emancipated without hard work and dedicated individuals and institutions. The benefits of creation care are potentially immense and churches across the world, using biblical justification, should be actively working towards a better response to God's creation.

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Appendix A

Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), p.7-8

they smoke the sacred pipe or enter or leave the sweatlodge. "All our relations" implies all beings, all things, the ones we see and the ones we do not; the whirling galaxies and the wild suns, the black holes and the microorganisms, the trees and the stars, the fish and the whales, the wolves and the porpoises, the flowers and the rocks, the molten lava and the towering snow-capped mountains, the children we give birth to and their children, and theirs, and theirs, and theirs. The unemployed single mother and the university student, the campesino and the landowner, the frog in the pond and the snake in the grass, the colors of a bright sunny day and the utter darkness of a rain forest at night, the plumage of sparkling parrots and the beat of an African drum, the kiva of the Hopi and the wonder of Chartres Cathedral, the excitement of New York City and the despair of an overcrowded prison are included as well.

Creation is all space, all time—all things past, present, and future. Among these three ways of conceptualizing time, creation leans the most in the direction of the present, for the most significant of the times is in the Now, the "Eternal Now." By the choices we make now about what we birth, the past presses into the future. Whether the future presents itself as still more beauty or as still more pain depends upon our choices as we respond to our role as co-creators in an ever-unfolding creation. In us the past and present come together to birth a future. As Eckhart puts it:

God is creating the entire universe fully and totally in this present now.
Everything God created six thousand years ago—
and even previous to that as God made the world—
God creates now all at once.
Everything which God created millions of years ago
and everything which will be created by God
after millions of years—
if the world endures until then—
God is creating all that in the innermost and
deepest realms of the soul.

Everything of the past and everything of the present
and everything of the future
God creates in the innermost realms of the soul.

Creation, then, at its core, is about relation. It is the spiraling, dancing, crouching, springing, leaping, surprising act of relatedness, of communing, of responding, of letting go, of being. Being is about relation. Eckhart says that "relation is the essence of everything that exists" and that "isness is God." Thus all creation is a trace, a footprint, an offspring of the Godhead. Creation is the passing by of divinity in the form of isness. It is God's shadow in our midst. It is sacred. All our relationships are sacred. Native peoples know this. Jesus taught it. ("I am the vine, you are the branches." "My father and I are one.") Christians and other believers must learn anew the sacredness of creation. Without this, the "first article of faith," we are lost. Our children will be adrift and without a future. Despair rules and any talk of the "reign of God" lacks energy and truth.

Creation is, in many respects, what our species makes of it here on earth. How foolish of divinity to give us such divine and demonic power. What are we doing with it? Are we prepared spiritually for this awesome task of justice making; of what science terms "homeostasis"—the quest for balance built into all things; of relating all things at the level of justice and not of power-over; of winners vs. losers? Have we truly outgrown war—war against ourselves, our bodies, our youth, our soil, our trees, ourselves? Humans are quite capable of sinning against creation, of missing the mark of our purpose in being on this planet and in this universe. In this sense, sin is a turning away from creation and its author, the divine one who dwells in all things. Sometimes we sin by omission—by not realizing or admitting sins against the biosphere (rightly called ecocide) or against earth species (biocide) or against the soil (geocide). Yet these are truly *mortal* sins, for they will prove to be deadly for generations yet to come.

Creation is the something new that happens when our first child is born; it is the resurrection we experience when we

"God is creating the entire universe fully and totally in this present now. Everything God created six thousand years ago- and even previous to that – as he made the world, God creates now all at once. Everything which God created millions of years ago and everything which will be created by God after millions of years – if the world endures until then – God is creating all that in the innermost and deepest realms of the soul. Everything of the past and everything of the present and everything of the future God creates in the innermost realms of the soul."

Appendix B

Thomas Berry, 'Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process.' In *Riverdale Papers on the Earth Community* (1987)

Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process

by Thomas Berry

1. The universe, the solar system, and the planet Earth, in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence, constitute for the human community the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.
2. The universe is a unity, an interacting and genetically-related community of beings bound together in an inseparable relationship in space and time. The unity of planet Earth is especially clear: each being of the planet is profoundly implicated in the existence and functioning of every other being.
3. From its beginning, the universe is a psychic as well as a physical reality.
4. The three basic laws of the universe at all levels of reality are differentiation, subjectivity, and communion.
5. The human is that being in whom the universe attains reflexive consciousness of itself.
6. The Earth, within the solar system, is a self-emergent, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing, self-fulfilling community. All particular life-systems in their being, their nourishment, their education, their governing, their healing, their fulfillment must integrate their functioning within this larger complex of mutually dependent Earth systems.
7. The genetic coding process is the process through which the world of living evolves, educates, and rules itself. The great wonder is the creative interaction of the multiple codings among themselves.
8. At the human level, genetic coding mandates a further trans-genetic cultural coding by which specifically human qualities find expression. Cultural coding is carried on by educational processes.
9. The emergent process of the universe is irreversible and non-repeatable in the existing world order. The movement from non-life to life on the planet Earth is a one-time event. So, too, the movement from life to the human form of consciousness. The movement from the simpler to more complex cultural forms is also, most likely, irreversible on the larger time scale.
10. The historical sequence of cultural periods can be identified as the tribal-shamanic period, the classical civilizational period of the great religious cultures, the scientific-technological period, and the ecological period.
11. The main human task of the immediate future is to assist in activating the intercommunion of all the living and non-living components of the Earth community in what can be considered the emerging ecological period of Earth development.
12. Functionally, the great art of achieving this historical goal is the art of intimacy and distance, the capacity of being to be totally present to each other while further affirming and enhancing the differences and identities of each.

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Appendix C

Chris Cowap, 'Not Just Ecology, Not Just Economics—ECO-JUSTICE' in *Eco-Justice—The Unfinished Journey* ed. by William E. Gibson, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.16

death in 1988, she gave invaluable leadership to the formation and the identity of the Working Group. The initial projects and programs of the Group culminated in a December 1–3, 1986 national ecumenical consultation, "For the Love of Earth and People: The Eco-Justice Agenda." Indeed it proved to be a major consultation, with consequences, and I shall make further references to it in my notes. In the article that follows, Chris Cowap announces the consultation and expresses her hopes for the relationships and mechanisms that it may generate.

This article is a good introduction to the eco-justice perspective. In brief compass, Cowap's grounding for the consultation includes the following key elements of the way today's world is viewed and understood from the perspective of eco-justice:

- 1. Rejection of the anthropocentric valuation of the nonhuman strictly in terms of what is good for humans.*
- 2. Recognition that the anthropocentric way of valuing and devaluing nature is deeply imbedded in Western technocratic civilization.*
- 3. Acknowledgment of Christian implication in the misuse of the verses in Genesis 1 telling humans to "subdue" the earth and exercise "dominion."*
- 4. Acceptance of scientific findings that the harsh treatment of nature by humans has become destructive to themselves.*
- 5. Insistence on the inseparability of ecology and economics and the folly of treating them as competing concerns.*
- 6. Recognition of the herculean difficulties of changing anthropocentric assumptions and making economics ecologically responsible.*
- 7. Affirmation of ecology/justice as a religious concern posing major new challenges to the churches.*

The concern of the churches for economic justice, to which Cowap refers, had begun to wane somewhat even as she wrote. Her reference reflects the prophetic voice for justice of mainstream Christianity, which had been raised with some vigor in the 1960s and continued into the 1970s. I think, however, that the slowness of the churches to accept eco-justice as a religious concern was not because they saw environmentalism as competitive with economic justice. It was related more to a turning inward and a general weakening of their prophetic role in society, which became apparent in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s.